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REVIEWED BY Joan Izenberg DATE 10/5/81
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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SAIGON 26445

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

SUBJ: PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDACY OF GENERAL THIEU

REF: SAIGON 26186, 26288

1. ENGLISH EDITION VIETNAM PRESS (VP) MAY 21 CARRIED FOLLOWING ITEM: QUOTE CONFIRMING A FOREIGN PRESS REPORT ANNOUNCING THAT DIRECTORY CHAIRMAN, LT.GEN. NGUYEN VAN THIEU WILL RUN FOR PRESIDENCY, MAJOR TAN VAN SAM, THE DIRECTORY'S PRESS OFFICER, HAS JUST TOLD A VP CORRESPONDENT, "DIRECTORY CHAIRMAN LT. GEN. NGUYEN VAN THIEU HAS DECIDED TO RUN FOR PRESIDENCY. HE WILL OFFICIALLY ANNOUNCE HIS DECISION ON A CONVENIENT DATE." END QUOTE.

2. COMMENT: THIEU'S INTENTIONS REMAIN UNCLEAR. HE HAS STILL NOT FORMALLY ANNOUNCED HIS CANDIDACY. BUNKER

(D)

NOTE: ADVANCE COPY SENT TO S/S-O AT 5:34 A.M., 5/23/67
PASSED: WHITE HOUSE, DOD, CIA, USIA, NSA AT 5:34, 5/23/67

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INCOMING TELEGRAM *Department of State*

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S E C R E T SAIGON 26467

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REF: STATE 198956

1. WE ARE IN GENERAL AGREEMENT WITH THE OBSERVATIONS IN YOUR 198956 CONCERNING THE NEED FOR A REAL CONTEST AND THE IMPORTANCE OF CONVINCING ALL FACTIONS THAT THEY MUST CONDUCT A FAIR ELECTION AND UNITE BEHIND THE WINNER. WE HAVE MADE THESE POINTS REPEATEDLY TO ALL CONCERNED AND WILL CONTINUE TO DO SO.
2. WE ALSO AGREE THAT AN IDEAL SOLUTION WOULD BE FOR BOTH KY AND THIEU TO JOIN AS MEMBERS OF TWO MAJOR POLITICAL GROUPS WHICH WOULD INCLUDE THE CHIEF CIVILIAN CONTENDERS. THIS DOES NOT SEEM TO BE A PRACTICAL POSSIBILITY, HOWEVER. IN THE FIRST PLACE, THE CIVILIAN CANDIDATES SEE THE RIVALRY BETWEEN KY AND THIEU AS THEIR GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY. HUONG'S REPORTED DECISION TO RUN AND HIS APPARENT

PAGE 2 RUMJIR 26467 S E C R E T
DECISION NOT TO JOIN FORCES WITH KY IS PROBABLY A DIRECT RESULT OF HIS OBSERVATION THAT HIS OWN CHANCES OF VICTORY ARE MUCH ENHANCED BY THE DIVISION WITHIN THE MILITARY. NEITHER HUONG NOR SUU ARE LIKELY TO MAKE AN ALLIANCE WITH THE MILITARY IF THEY THINK THEY CAN WIN WITHOUT MAKING ANY SPECIFIC DEAL THAT WOULD DILUTE THEIR OWN FREEDOM OF ACTION AFTER THE ELECTIONS.
3. MORE IMPORTANT, WE CONTINUE TO FEAR THE POSSIBLE RESULTS OF SUCH A SPLIT IN THE MILITARY. THE STABILITY WHICH WE HAVE HAD FOR THE PAST TWO YEARS HAS RESTED ON A DEGREE OF MILITARY UNITY WHICH IS FRAGILE AND NOW ALREADY SUBJECT TO VERY HEAVY STRAINS. IF THIS FRAGILE UNITY IS FURTHER SUBJECTED TO THE TENSIONS OF A HARD-FOUGHT ELECTION CAMPAIGN, WE THINK THE RISK OF SERIOUSLY UNDERMINING MILITARY DISCIPLINE IS VERY GREAT. WE CONTINUE TO DOUBT THAT AS A PRACTICAL MATTER THE OFFICERS INVOLVED CAN ISOLATE THEIR POLITICAL ROLE AND ATTITUDES FROM THEIR MILITARY ACTIVITIES, ALTHOUGH THIS WOULD BE THE BEST SOLUTION IF IT COULD REALLY BE ACHIEVED. IF THEY BREAK ON POLITICAL GROUNDS, WE FEAR THEY WILL NOT BE ABLE

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TO PERFORM THEIR VITAL FIGHTING AND PACIFICATION ROLES EFFECTIVELY THEREAFTER. WE ALSO FEAR THAT THE LOSING FACTION IN THE POLITICAL STRUGGLE WILL BE SORELY TEMPTED TO TRY TO REDRESS THE BALANCE

PAGE 3 RUMJIR 26467 S E C R E T
WITH THE MILITARY RESOURCES AT THEIR DISPOSAL. THIS OF COURSE RAISES THE SPECTRE OF COUPS AND COUNTER-COUPS THAT PLAGUED VIET NAM FOR SO LONG AFTER DIEM WAS OVERTHROWN.
4. WE THEREFORE CONTINUE TO THINK THAT THE BEST WAY TO POST-ELECTION NATIONAL UNITY AND STABILITY IS FOR THE MILITARY TO BACK A SINGLE CANDIDATE WHO WILL TEAM UP WITH STRONG CIVILIAN LEADERS WHO COMPLEMENT THE MILITARY CANDIDATE. IF SUCH A TICKET IS OFFEREDN IT WILL TEND TO GATHER SUPPORT FROM THOSE WHO WANT TO BE ON THE WINNING TEAM. IT WILL ALSO OFFER THE BEST PROSPECT OF A TRUE MILITARY-CIVILIAN PARTNERSHIP CAPABLE OF PROSECUTING THE WAR AND PACIFICATION WITH SINGLENESS OF PURPOSE AND EVENTUALLY CAPABLE OF NEGOTIATING AN ACCEPTABLE PEACE.
5. AT SOME POINT WE MAY FIND IT NECESSARY TO THROW OUR WEIGHT BEHIND KY OR THIEU IN ORDER TO FORCE A RESOLUTION OF THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THEM. CERTAINLY THE PRESENT MANEUVERING IS BEGINNING TO BE DESTRUCTIVE OF MILITARY UNITY. IT WOULD BE MUCH BETTER, HOWEVER, FOR BOTH MILITARY UNITY AND OUR FUTURE RELATIONS WITHE THE NEW GOVERNMENT IF THIS WERE NOT NECESSARY, SINCE THE RESULTING TICKET WILL INEVITABLY BECOME IDENTIFIED AS AN AMERICAN ONE. WE BELIEVE

PAGE 4 RUMJIR 26467 S E C R E T
THAT THERE IS AT THIS TIME STILL ROOM TO HOPE THAT THIEU AND KY WILL COME TO TERMS WITHOUT OUR INTERFERENCE. BUI DIEM'S ROLE, AS REPORTED SEPARATELY, MAY BE HELPFUL. THEY ARE CERTAINLY AWARE THAT IF THEY BOTH RUN, THE PROSPECTS FOR EITHER WINNING ARE MUCH REDUCED. THEY MUST ALSO RECOGNIZE THAT SPLITTING THE MILITARY MAY ENDANGER THEIR COUNTRY'S FUTURE. IF WE CAN PERSUADE THEM THAT THEY CANNOT ENLIST US ON THE SIDE OF EITHER FACTION, THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO COMPOSE THEIR DIFFERENCES. MOREOVER, THERE IS THE REAL POSSIBILITY THAT NOTHING WE COULD SAY OR DO WOULD FORCE ONE OR THE OTHER TO WITHDRAW FROM THE CONTEST AT THIS TIME. WE ARE THEREFORE INCLINED FOR THE PRESENT TO CONTINUE OUR POLICY OF TAKING THE SIDE OF NEITHER IN A CLEAR WAY WHILE URGING BOTH, DIRECTLY AND INDIRECTLY, TO GET TOGETHER AND WORK OUT A COMPROMISE.

BUNKER
MT

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NOTE: PASSED S/S-O, WHITE HOUSE, DOD, CIA AT 9:52 A.M. 5/23/67